

Research Paper

Correlation Between Exam Anxiety and Procrastination Moderated by Self-Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

Academic procrastination and exam anxiety undermine student success, yet the moderating role of self-efficacy remains underexplored. This quantitative correlational study (N = 140 Indian undergraduate/postgraduate students) examined the relationship between exam anxiety and academic procrastination, testing self-efficacy as a moderator. Data were collected via online surveys using the Test Anxiety Questionnaire ($\alpha \approx 0.90$), Academic Procrastination Scale ($\alpha \approx 0.82$), and General Self-Efficacy Scale ($\alpha = 0.76-0.90$). SPSS analyses revealed moderate variable levels (anxiety M = 2.61, SD = 0.77; procrastination M = 2.97, SD = 0.53; self-efficacy M = 2.94, SD = 0.54). Pearson correlations confirmed positive anxiety-procrastination ($r = .281, p = .001$), and negative self-efficacy links (anxiety $r = -.203, p = .016$; procrastination $r = -.298, p < .001$). PROCESS Macro moderation (Model 1) showed a significant interaction ($\beta = -.161, p = .042$; $R^2 = 0.166$), indicating self-efficacy buffers anxiety's effect on procrastination. Findings support all hypotheses and suggest self-efficacy interventions to disrupt maladaptive cycles, advancing self-regulated learning theory. The study concludes that bolstering self-efficacy equips students to manage evaluative stress adaptively.

Keywords: *Academic Procrastination, Exam Anxiety, Indian Students, Moderation Analysis, Self-Efficacy*

Academic achievement results from a dynamic blend of cognitive, emotional, and motivational influences. Two especially common obstacles that undermine student performance worldwide are test-related anxiety and academic procrastination. Test anxiety is characterized as a strong emotional reaction to evaluative situations, marked by tension, nervousness, and apprehension that can disrupt concentration and memory during examinations (Zeidner, 1998). This type of anxiety is linked with lower grades and heightened psychological distress (Sarason, 1984). For many learners, the dread of failure or sub-par performance triggers a cycle of worry that hampers optimal functioning.

In contrast, academic procrastination refers to the deliberate postponement or avoidance of scholarly tasks, even when students recognize that such delays may have detrimental outcomes (Steel, 2007). Procrastination is more than poor time-management; it often reflects

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difficulties in regulating emotions, with students putting off work to escape the stress or anxiety the tasks evoke (Ferrari, 2010). The resulting last-minute cramming, inferior work quality, and amplified stress further exacerbate academic problems.

The link between test anxiety and procrastination is well documented. Studies indicate that procrastination can serve as a maladaptive coping strategy for anxiety-laden academic demands (Tice & Baumeister, 1997). Learners who experience high levels of test anxiety may sidestep studying or completing assignments to obtain short-term relief, only to find that anxiety intensifies as deadlines loom. This reciprocal interaction creates a negative feedback loop that damages both performance and well-being.

A pivotal psychological construct that may shape these dynamics is self-efficacy—the belief in one’s capability to organize and execute actions needed to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy influences cognition, affect, and motivation. Students who possess strong academic self-efficacy tend to confront challenging tasks with confidence, persist longer when obstacles arise, and bounce back more quickly from setbacks (Zimmerman, 2000). Conversely, low self-efficacy is associated with heightened anxiety and avoidance behaviors, including procrastination.

Bandura’s Social-Cognitive Theory (1986) provides the theoretical grounding for understanding self-efficacy’s role in anxiety and procrastination. The theory posits that learning occurs within a social milieu where personal factors, behavior, and environmental conditions interact reciprocally. Within this structure, self-efficacy functions as a central mechanism that shapes motivation and emotional states. According to Bandura, individuals with robust self-efficacy are better able to regulate anxiety and sustain goal-directed actions despite stress, suggesting that self-efficacy may both predict levels of procrastination and anxiety and moderate the connection between them.

Although numerous investigations have examined the direct impact of self-efficacy on procrastination and anxiety, relatively few have explored its moderating function. Clarifying this moderation is essential because it can reveal how self-efficacy alters the strength or direction of the anxiety-procrastination link. For example, a student experiencing intense test anxiety might resort to procrastination chiefly when self-efficacy is low, whereas high self-efficacy could buffer or diminish this tendency. Recognizing such a protective effect can guide targeted interventions that boost self-efficacy, thereby alleviating the adverse outcomes of test anxiety.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to (1) examine the correlation between test anxiety and academic procrastination and (2) determine whether self-efficacy moderates this relationship. By probing these connections, the research aims to enrich our comprehension of the psychological mechanisms that drive academic behavior and to furnish evidence-based recommendations for promoting student success and mental health.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sarfraz et al. (2025) examined academic self-efficacy, procrastination, and psychological distress among 300 university students. They found that higher self-efficacy was significantly negatively correlated with procrastination, anxiety, and stress. Procrastination was positively correlated with mental distress, indicating the importance of fostering self-efficacy to support student well-being.

Correlation Between Exam Anxiety and Procrastination Moderated by Self-Efficacy

Farhadi Rad et al. (2025) investigated predictors of academic procrastination among medical sciences students. Academic self-efficacy was negatively associated with procrastination, while difficulties in emotional regulation were positively correlated. This highlighted how low confidence and poor emotion regulation increase task avoidance tendencies.

Khan, Siddique & Abbasi (2025) explored academic self-efficacy in conjunction with time management and procrastination. Procrastination was negatively correlated with self-efficacy, and time management partially mediated this relationship, indicating that better time management strengthens the beneficial effect of self-efficacy.

Huang & Zhu (2025) investigated perceived support from teachers, self-efficacy, and procrastination among elementary students. Academic self-efficacy fully mediated the negative relationship between teacher support and procrastination, suggesting that supportive environments enhance self-confidence and reduce delay behaviours.

Malespina, Seifollahi & Singh (2025) researched test anxiety and its effect on academic performance in undergraduate physics students. Higher test anxiety was associated with lower assessment scores and lower self-efficacy, illustrating how anxiety and confidence jointly affect achievement.

Woldeab (2025) investigated online exam anxiety and procrastination. Anxiety toward proctored online assessments significantly predicted procrastination, highlighting contextual effects of digital learning on academic behaviours.

Chen & Lopez (2024) examined procrastination, self-efficacy, and self-control among university students in china. A negative correlation was found between self-efficacy and procrastination, with self-control partially mediating the relationship, suggesting that stronger confidence and discipline reduce procrastination.

Bishmi & Anto (2024) studied academic self-efficacy and procrastination among high school students and reported a strong negative correlation. Lower confidence predicted higher procrastination, highlighting the importance of building self-efficacy early in education.

Tamara & Dewanto (2024) studied how learning motivation and self-efficacy influence academic procrastination among Indonesian university students. Self-efficacy significantly predicted procrastination, with higher confidence predicting less delay, while motivational levels also played a role.

Rezaei-Gazki, Ilaghi & Masoumian (2024) explored the role of anxiety in academic procrastination among medical and dental students. Anxiety significantly predicted procrastination, and stronger anxiety was linked to lower academic performance, implying that emotional distress contributes to avoidance behaviours.

Pratama, Zulaikhah & Irawan (2024) examined self-efficacy and academic procrastination among higher education students. A significant negative correlation was found, where students with higher confidence in academic abilities procrastinated less, accounting for a notable variance in procrastination scores.

Correlation Between Exam Anxiety and Procrastination Moderated by Self-Efficacy

Samuel & Okonkwo (2023) investigated academic procrastination, test anxiety, and self-esteem among Nigerian secondary school students. Procrastination and test anxiety were positively correlated, indicating that students who delayed tasks experienced greater exam anxiety, which in turn was associated with lower achievement.

Wang (2021) conducted a longitudinal study of Chinese high school students and found a reciprocal relationship between academic procrastination and test anxiety: higher procrastination predicted higher anxiety later and vice versa, demonstrating a cyclical pattern.

Shih (2021) studied test anxiety, perfectionism, and academic engagement in Taiwanese high school students. Higher anxiety predicted lower engagement and higher procrastination, especially for students with maladaptive perfectionism.

Öngen (2021) examined academic procrastination and self-efficacy in Turkish university students. A strong negative correlation was found between self-efficacy and procrastination, suggesting that confidence predicts timely task initiation.

Kim & Seo (2020) examined self-efficacy and procrastination among Korean university students and found that higher self-efficacy reduced procrastination, while test anxiety amplified procrastination, highlighting the interactive effects of confidence and anxiety on task avoidance.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The investigation employs a quantitative, correlational framework to explore the interrelations among exam-related anxiety, academic procrastination, and self-efficacy.

Variables of the Study

- **Predictor (Independent) Variable:** Exam Anxiety
- **Outcome (Dependent) Variable:** Academic Procrastination
- **Moderator Variable:** Self-Efficacy

Operational Definitions

- **Exam Anxiety:** The intensity of emotional, mental, and physiological unease that students experience in test situations, assessed with the Test Anxiety Questionnaire.
- **Academic Procrastination:** The propensity to defer or postpone scholarly duties such as exam preparation, measured by the Academic Procrastination Scale
- **Self-efficacy:** The confidence individuals hold regarding their capability to cope with academic tasks and challenges, evaluated through the General Self-Efficacy Scale.

Objectives of the Study

1. Determine the prevalence of exam anxiety, academic procrastination, and self-efficacy among undergraduate and postgraduate learners.
2. Investigate the association between exam anxiety and academic procrastination.
3. Explore how self-efficacy relates to exam anxiety.
4. Examine the link between self-efficacy and academic procrastination.
5. Test whether self-efficacy functions as a moderator in the relationship between exam anxiety and academic procrastination

Correlation Between Exam Anxiety and Procrastination Moderated by Self-Efficacy

Hypotheses

- H1: Exam anxiety will be positively correlated with academic procrastination.
- H2: Self-efficacy will be negatively correlated with exam anxiety.
- H3: Self-efficacy will be negatively correlated with academic procrastination.
- H4: Self-efficacy will significantly moderate the relationship between exam anxiety and academic procrastination.

Sample

Includes:

- Sample size: $N = 140$ participants
- Population: Undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in Indian higher-education institutions
- Inclusion and exclusion criteria: Eligible participants were university students aged 18 or older, actively enrolled in degree programmes across diverse fields of study. Excluded were individuals under 18, those not currently registered or not sitting for exams, and respondents who submitted incomplete surveys.

Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling was employed for participant selection.

Tools Used / Instruments

Three measures were used in this study to assess test anxiety, academic procrastination, and generalized self-efficacy among participants.

- Test Anxiety Questionnaire, developed by Nist and Diehl (1990), consisted of 10 items. It is a reliable tool with Cronbach's $\alpha \approx 0.90$ (good internal consistency) and is reported as reliable and valid across student samples.
- Academic Procrastination Scale, developed by Clarry Lay (1986), included 20 items. This scale demonstrates good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha \approx 0.82$) and construct validity supported in student research.
- Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale, developed by Ralf Schwarzer and Matthias Jerusalem (1992), comprised 10 items. It shows good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha \approx 0.76\text{--}0.90$) and validity through correlations with related psychological constructs.

Procedure of Data Collection

Data were gathered via an online questionnaire. Prior to participation, respondents received a brief description of the study's purpose and gave informed consent. The survey items were presented in a fixed sequence, and all responses were recorded anonymously. Participants held the right to withdraw at any point without any consequences.

Statistical Analysis

Analyses will be performed with SPSS. Descriptive statistics will summarize the sample characteristics. Pearson correlation coefficients will test the bivariate relationships among the variables. To examine the moderating effect of self-efficacy, a moderation analysis will be executed.

Ethical Considerations: The study adhered strictly to ethical standards: participation was voluntary, confidentiality was ensured, and no personally identifying information was collected. No physical or psychological harm was presented to participants.

Limitations of the Study

- Dependence on self-report instruments may introduce response bias.
- The cross-sectional design precludes definitive causal conclusions.
- Use of convenience sampling limits the extent to which findings can be generalized.

Delimitations

- The research focused exclusively on Indian undergraduate and postgraduate students.
- Only anxiety linked to examinations was examined, not other forms of academic stress.
- All questionnaires were administered in English, potentially affecting comprehension for non-native speakers.

RESULTS**Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive information was calculated for the principal constructs: Exam-Related Anxiety (TOTAL_TEST_A), Academic Procrastination (TOTAL_PRO), and General Self-Efficacy (TOTAL_GEN). The central tendency, dispersion, and score range for each variable are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for Exam Anxiety, Procrastination, and Self-Efficacy.

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Exam Anxiety	140	1.20	5.00	2.6143	0.77595
Procrastination	140	1.40	4.25	2.9761	0.53157
Self-Efficacy	140	1.00	4.00	2.9450	0.54973

The average scores reveal that participants display moderate levels of exam anxiety, procrastination, and self-efficacy.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed to explore the inter-relationships among exam anxiety, academic procrastination, and self-efficacy. The correlation matrix is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Pearson correlations among study variables (N = 140).

Variables	1	2	3
1. Exam Anxiety	—		
2. Procrastination	.281**	—	
3. Self-Efficacy	-.203*	-.298**	—

Note: $p < .05$; $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Interpretation:

- Exam anxiety is positively linked with procrastination ($r = .281$, $p = .001$); higher anxiety tends to accompany greater procrastination.
- Self-efficacy shows a negative association with exam anxiety ($r = -.203$, $p = .016$), indicating that individuals with stronger efficacy beliefs experience less anxiety.
- Self-efficacy is also inversely related to procrastination ($r = -.298$, $p < .001$), suggesting that more efficacious students procrastinate less.

These correlations lend support to Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3.

Moderation Analysis

To determine whether self-efficacy moderates the link between exam anxiety and academic procrastination, a moderation model (PROCESS Macro Model 1) was estimated. The dependent variable was procrastination (TOTAL_PRO), the predictor was exam anxiety (TOTAL_TEST_A), and the moderator was self-efficacy (TOTAL_GEN).

Table 3. Summary of the moderation model.

Model Summary and ANOVA

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.407	0.166	0.147	0.4909

The overall regression reached statistical significance, $F(3, 136) = 8.992$, $p < .001$, accounting for 16.6 % of the variance in procrastination.

Table 4. Unstandardized and standardized regression coefficients for the moderation analysis.

Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p
Constant	2.999	0.043	—	69.754	< .001
Exam Anxiety (Z-scored)	0.123	0.043	0.231	2.892	.004
Self-Efficacy (Z-scored)	-0.130	0.043	-0.245	-3.064	.003
Interaction (Anxiety $\times$ SE)	-0.083	0.040	-0.161	-2.053	.042

Interpretation

- Exam anxiety positively predicts procrastination ($\beta = .231$, $p = .004$); elevated anxiety is associated with increased procrastination.
- Self-efficacy negatively predicts procrastination ($\beta = -.245$, $p = .003$); higher efficacy corresponds to reduced procrastination.
- The interaction term is significant ($\beta = -.161$, $p = .042$), indicating that self-efficacy moderates the anxiety–procrastination relationship. Specifically, the slope linking anxiety to procrastination becomes less steep as self-efficacy rises, implying that students with stronger efficacy beliefs are buffered against anxiety-driven procrastination.

These results confirm Hypothesis 4

Summary

All four hypothesized relationships were supported. Exam anxiety is positively related to academic procrastination; self-efficacy is negatively related to both exam anxiety and procrastination; and self-efficacy functions as a moderator, attenuating the positive effect of anxiety on procrastination at higher levels of efficacy.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**Discussion**

The current investigation explored how exam-related anxiety, academic procrastination, and self-efficacy interrelate in both undergraduate and graduate cohorts, with a special focus on whether self-efficacy moderates those links. The results fully supported the initial predictions and shed light on the psychological processes that drive students' academic

conduct. By bringing together affective, behavioural, and cognitive-motivational variables within a single analytical model, the study advances our grasp of how inner psychological assets shape learners' reactions to evaluative pressure.

Core Findings

Link between Anxiety and Procrastination

In line with earlier theory and research, higher levels of exam anxiety were found to correspond with greater academic procrastination. This outcome reinforces the view of procrastination not simply as a time-management flaw but as a strategy for regulating uncomfortable emotions. When students view examinations as threatening or fear negative judgment, anxiety can disrupt focus, diminish cognitive efficiency, and trigger avoidance. Procrastination thus acts as a short-term coping tactic that eases immediate distress, yet it typically magnifies stress over time as deadlines loom and preparation time shrinks. The data therefore support a maladaptive feedback cycle: anxiety fuels procrastination, which in turn heightens anxiety, ultimately compromising performance and well-being.

Self-Efficacy's Protective Role

Negative correlations emerged between self-efficacy and both exam anxiety and procrastination, underscoring the pivotal influence of perceived competence on academic functioning. Students who feel capable report less anxiety about exams, suggesting that confidence transforms the perception of tests from overwhelming threats into manageable challenges. From a cognitive-appraisal standpoint, strong efficacy beliefs promote a challenge-oriented interpretation of demanding tasks, reducing physiological arousal and rumination, and fostering emotional steadiness during evaluations.

Likewise, higher self-efficacy was linked to lower procrastination, echoing social-cognitive explanations of self-regulated learning. Confident learners tend to persist, commit to goals, and plan strategically—behaviours that run counter to chronic delay. Those with low efficacy are more prone to self-doubt, fear of failure, and avoidance, heightening their susceptibility to procrastination.

Moderation Analysis

The most notable contribution of the research lies in the moderation test, which revealed that self-efficacy significantly weakens the positive relationship between exam anxiety and procrastination. As self-efficacy rises, the strength of the anxiety-procrastination link declines. This empirical evidence backs the “buffering hypothesis,” positioning self-efficacy as a psychological shield. In other words, while anxiety can push students toward delay, the effect is not uniform; individuals with robust efficacy beliefs are better able to sustain adaptive academic actions despite heightened stress.

Interpreting this through self-regulatory theory, self-efficacy shapes not only behavioral choices but also emotional-regulation tactics. High-efficacy students are more likely to employ problem-focused coping, structured study schedules, and cognitive re-framing, preventing anxiety from escalating into avoidance. Conversely, low-efficacy learners may doubt their coping capacity, making disengagement and postponement more likely when confronted with exam-related pressure. Thus, efficacy does not erase anxiety but modulates how anxiety translates into action.

Theoretical Implications

These results refine our understanding of academic stress responses. Rather than treating exam anxiety as universally harmful, the findings show that its behavioral consequences are partly contingent on internal belief systems. Highlighting self-efficacy as a moderator moves the field beyond simple correlation models toward a nuanced view of how cognition and emotion interact in academic contexts.

Practical Recommendations

From an applied perspective, the study suggests that interventions targeting anxiety alone may fall short unless they simultaneously bolster students' efficacy beliefs. Programs that provide mastery experiences, set incremental goals, deliver constructive feedback, teach study skills, and showcase peer modelling can effectively raise self-efficacy. Incorporating cognitive-behavioural strategies that challenge maladaptive competence beliefs may further diminish vulnerability to both anxiety and avoidance. Universities might consider structured workshops, mentorship schemes, and resilience-building initiatives designed to enhance learners' confidence in their academic abilities.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several constraints temper the conclusions. Reliance on self-report instruments raises concerns about common-method bias and social desirability, potentially leading participants to understate procrastination or overstate efficacy. Future work could integrate objective performance metrics, behavioural monitoring of study habits, or experimental manipulations of efficacy to improve validity. Moreover, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; longitudinal studies are needed to clarify the temporal ordering among anxiety, self-efficacy, and procrastination. It is plausible that chronic procrastination could erode efficacy over time, creating a reciprocal loop.

The sample—conveniently drawn from Indian students—limits generalizability. Cultural attitudes toward achievement, parental expectations, and societal pressure may shape both anxiety and motivational beliefs. Cross-cultural research would reveal whether the moderating role of self-efficacy holds across diverse educational settings. Additional variables such as perfectionism, emotional intelligence, academic resilience, or coping styles merit exploration to construct a richer model of academic self-regulation.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the investigation provides solid empirical support for a positive link between exam anxiety and academic procrastination, and a negative link between self-efficacy and both constructs. Crucially, self-efficacy moderates the anxiety-procrastination relationship, acting as a protective psychological resource that dampens the conversion of anxiety into avoidance behaviour. These insights highlight the centrality of cognitive beliefs in shaping emotional experiences and actions within academic environments. Strengthening students' self-efficacy emerges as a promising, sustainable strategy for curbing procrastination, managing exam stress, and fostering broader academic adjustment. By nurturing strong efficacy beliefs, educators can empower learners to confront evaluative challenges more effectively, cultivating resilience, persistence, and confidence that extend beyond the classroom.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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